

FIERCE-FACE
The Story of a Tiger



OTHER BOOKS FOR CHILDREN
BY DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI

GAY NECK

CHIEF OF THE HERD

KARI THE ELEPHANT

THE MASTER MONKEY

GHOND: THE HUNTER

HARI THE JUNGLE LAD

JUNGLE BEASTS AND MEN

RAMA, THE HERO OF INDIA

BUNNY, HOUND AND CLOWN

HINDU FABLES FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY, INC
PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK



FIERCE-FACE

The Story of a Tiger

DHAN GOPAL MUKERJI



ILLUSTRATED BY DOROTHY P. LATHROP
Published by E. P. Dutton & Company, Incorporated
IMPRINTED AT NEW YORK ANNO DOMINI MCMXXXVI

INTRODUCTION

IF THE present story, the biography of a tiger, is scrutinized carefully the discerning adult reader will notice a unique presentation of reality. It is a truism that the modern boys and girls do not see nor hear the way their grandparents did. The camera, the talking pictures and the radio have made changes that are perceptible. Eyes flit from object to object; ears hear more than one noise at a time; and the mind decides upon ideas with unprecedented speed.

In FIERCE-FACE I have sought to present some information about the jungle through the life of a tiger. But he moves and lives with a quickness and angularity that would satisfy the camera-bred eyes of our age. Those who read aloud to children will be able to read this story over the radio without being misunderstood. Certain simple reiterations and pauses have been placed so as to enable the listening youngsters to feel as if a voice from India is broadcasting. I have not sacrificed my mystical beliefs. They are part and parcel of my inner being. But it behooves the artist in all of us to attempt to reach the young through their modes of sight, hearing, feeling and thinking. If the reader has the patience to read the following pages he will find in them the enchantment of the Indian jungle and the Hindu belief that Man, nature, and animal life are but facets of the Divine.

D. G. M.

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FIERCE-FACE
The Story of a Tiger





FIERCE-FACE

DURING the first two months of his life Fierce-Face knew nothing of his father. His mother, Bagni, took good care to nurse him in secret.

Generally, fathers of the cat tribe detest their sons. They try to kill them. It is the great care that the mother takes in protecting her cubs that saves them from slaughter.

Until his skin had grown tough — tough enough to withstand another cat's slashing claw — Bagni did not present her child to his father.

Hardly had the second month passed when her husband located her. It was utterly unexpected. But nothing harmful took place. The cub and its sire seemed to make friends with each other instantly. Though this brought peace to the mother's heart, she did not

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relax her vigilance. After the thrill of their meeting had passed, Bagni took good care to remain between the two males while they marched from place to place. During the day, when her husband and son slept, she kept wide awake lying between them.

The cub's growth seemed to increase his mother's fondness for him. This the father resented. Each day he grew more and more irritable.

One night while the entire family was pursuing a Sambur deer, the cub got in the way, letting the prey escape. Angered beyond control the elder cat fell upon him. The mother hurried to the scene. At a glance she realized the fatal strife. Her first impulse was to separate the two fighters. At that very moment a sudden howl of pain from Fierce-Face made her insane with anger. Like a cobra, she buried her teeth in the father's neck. As the male struck her with his claws, it dawned on her that on her safety depended that of her baby's. Her fears gave way to the loving fury of her motherhood. Her jaws gripped the killer's body with a strength that he had never experienced.

He let go of the cub who ran into a brook not far off to cool his scalding wounds. He trembled in terror



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every time his parents raged and roared in the outer dark. The wind carried the dust and odor of battle to his nostrils, making him dizzy.

Meanwhile, Bagni assailed her mate with uncontrollable anger. Her teeth seemed to crunch his neckbone. With a cry of pain he exerted all his effort to tear himself away. Feeling that he was beaten, Bagni relaxed her grip. At once he disappeared in the jungle where he could soothe his aching wounds. Bagni made her way to the pool where Fierce-Face stood. After bathing herself and licking her son's wounds, she led him into a near-by hiding-place.

She, alone, had now to train her cub. There were many things Fierce-Face had to be taught before he could manage himself. First of all, to hunt by himself: The little tiger had to learn this before he was six months old.

One day his mother took him to a pool where pheasants drank. About sundown the pheasants came, splendid in carnelian and sapphire plumage. The leader, the male of the covey, strutted up and down the shore of the white stream which purled like a child. The chief pheasant shrilly hooted. Two more

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males came, leading about eighteen females, all shining brass and russet red.

Bagni softly dug her claw into the cub's body. Instantly, he pressed his belly to the grass and set out crawling. He moved slowly with the noiselessness of a snake.

In the meantime the males took their drink, then stood by to protect, while the females drank their fill.

A dry leaf cracked as it was crushed under Fierce-Face. The pheasants made ready to fly up into the nearest tree. Suddenly, a terrific growl rent the air. The mother tiger's call had a double effect. The birds were puzzled and held their ground, while the little cub leaped and fell on their leader. Alas, he had only the tail of the pheasant in his grip. With a clamor of wings the leader and the whole covey escaped to the trees above.

The tigress ambled up to the side of her infant. Instead of thrashing him, she spent the rest of the day in teaching him to hunt. One, two, three, he leapt at her as if she were a rabbit. Each time she eluded him. This went on till sundown.

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TRAINING

FIERCE-FACE was an animal; he had to be educated to become a good one in the manner resembling that of a human child. The difference that marks the training of the young of the two species lies in this: A tiger is trained within the first fifteen months of his life, while men educate their offspring for years.

A kitten in a man's world is as ignorant of the art of eating as a tiger-cub in the jungle. Their mothers have to teach them everything. A tigress has to begin at the beginning: the cub has to be shown where the most tender part of a kill is located. Even then, the little one hurts his lips several times, for he tries to bite too near the hoof or horn of an antelope.

Though Fierce-Face bruised himself more than once by attempting to start a meal with the wrong part of a deer, his parent would do nothing to correct him. She let him suffer and learn. She knew that the example she set was important. Imitating her, he slowly formed the right habit. Gradually, he learnt to look for the belly and the throat of a kill.

How to eat properly is not so difficult. But hunt-

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ing for a prey is most difficult. Any human being can be taught table-manners in a short time. It takes years to learn a craft by which he will win his daily bread. The art of hunting had to be mastered before the little one had passed his tenth month. Again and again the mother cat would lead Fierce-Face in sham charges against monkeys at the drinking place, herds of deer, and the wild blue cows, the nilgais. Each one of these served to destroy his sense of fear. Confidence took root in his mind.

Fear at first was his wisdom. Whatever felt unfamiliar made him hide. But with familiarity increased his desire to attack. After their first experience with nilgais, they set to attacking village cattle. In order to prove to him that tigers were superior in courage, the parent made a mock-attack. The cows had no bulls in the herd. For a bull fights back. In the present case, the very sight of Bagni made all the cows race home, their tails stabbing the sky.

It took several mock-hunts before the cub would banish fear. His terror rose from the feeling that he was tiny in size. A cow seemed very high, its eyes too large, and its horns bristled with menace. His last fear

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centred around elephants, towering high, swinging their trunks. Not only that, but his feet told him that the very ground trembles where an elephant walks. The earth quaked! The more he watched the big beasts, the deeper grew his respect for them. The ease with which elephants went in and out of the water strengthened his awe for them. As for their reach overhead, how could he measure it? Last of all, the care his family took to avoid them drove home the idea that the Hati* is a kingly animal. No man can imagine how an elephant appears when seen through the eyes of a tiger-kitten.

Seeing a whole herd of Hatis, suddenly abroad in the woods, he feels exposed, too exposed, to the eyes of the elephant. This is the reason for his fear. Tigers do not fear an elephant after they get acquainted with his habits. Only one animal is dreaded by them. It is not a reptile; nor a bird. Nor is it man. It is the wild boar.

One day Fierce-Face was brought near a horn-tooth. No sooner had the latter seen the cats than he charged. The mother roared and stood her ground.

* Elephant is called Hati or hand-headed.



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The pig, towering twice as high as she, came on. He had shut his eyes. He went by hearing. The ground trembled under his weight. His tusks flashed like crystal.

Imitating his mother, Fierce-Face, too, was facing the charge. Horn-tooth was within a dozen feet now, causing earthquakes. The quaking ground, instead of making him turn and run, roused Fierce-Face to reckless anger. A strange tremor ran through his body. Like an act in magic a mere cub became a male tiger. Suddenly, as if seized with a new will, he sprang at the enemy. He fell on the shoulder, digging his claws and teeth deep into the thick, harsh hair of the foe. The mother, having grasped the situation at a glance, leaped to his aid. She fell on the back of horn-tooth with a sky-piercing howl.

About twice a hundred pounds of cat hitting him like a bolt made the boar slip. Instead of falling, he careered in a circle, then nosed the ground. The cats had already jumped off his back.

By the time he had braced himself for another charge, the two "striped ones" were upon him. . . . The boar died without inflicting on them any injury.

III

DIRECTION OF GROWTH

ALONG with hunting, Fierce-Face was taught to conquer his environment. No tiger lives in places he cannot rule. Either he must remain utterly fearless or move into new forests. The cats always make sure that both land and water are their own servants. Wild wood or land they master within a short time. It takes them a longer while to make sure of the rivers bordering it. In order to do this tigers are taught swimming.

This proved very painful for Fierce-Face. The cub was most unhappy about it. But his mother was unyielding. After finding all pushing and cuffing worse than useless, one sundown she took a decided step. Without hinting at what was about to happen, she led him to a wide stream, deep enough to come up to the nose of a cub.

There they both took a drink and rested. As if prompted by something unknown Bagni plunged into the water. It reached to her throat. But no higher. Without casting a single glance backward, she headed to the other bank. After shaking the water off her body, she mewed sweetly to her son.

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His muscles stiffened. His eyes hardened. His tail trembled, then stiffened like a rod. Fear of the water, and of losing his mother were upon him. Just then he heard the loud snort of an animal from the rear. The tigress came back swiftly and pushed him into the stream, then started fording it with him.

This reminded him of the time when, hardly five weeks old, he was pushed into a shallow ravine to wash himself. There he rolled and screamed, till his own wits told him to walk to the shore. He remembered also this: how he had enjoyed being on dry ground once more.

At present he used his feet to feel the bed of the river carefully despite his mother's urging to move on rapidly. Hardly had he gone a quarter of the way through the water when he heard a few short but loud snorts. These and their echoes hitting the water stung him like arrows. Terror loosened his footing. He slipped. Here the water seemed too deep. He rolled and drifted down stream struggling with his outstretched paws.

A tiger opens his hand in order to strike. The little cat struck at the water. He repeated his stroke.

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To his amazement he found that instead of killing the stream he was swimming on it. . . .

The more he struck the liquid enemy the easier seemed the task of floating. Bagni now came abreast of him and pushed forward.

When they had clambered up the far bank they looked back to identify the noises that had been drawing towards the river. It was like a thing of magic: there stood a wall of tusks, trunks, and heads of elephants, an entire herd! They had come to their drinking place as usual and were showing their resentment of all felines by trumpeting.

Swimming increased the cub's sense of self-confidence. He felt like a master—both on water and solid ground.

Now the female instructor set about weeding their entire jungle of dangerous cats and dogs; such as leopards, wolves, dogs and cheetahs. Single-handed she succeeded in scaring them away permanently.

Fierce-Face devoured these lessons. He took time to digest the idea that if other beasts of prey roamed in his world, they would eat all the bovine herds, leaving nothing for him.



IV

DROUGHT-STRICKEN LAND

BAGNI went on teaching her cub. His final training lay in learning those feelings by which an animal knows remote dangers. Though remote, they are just as destructive as the attack by an enemy at hand. What are the remote dangers that threaten a tiger's life? They are fire, flood, drought and disease. A cat has to know them.

February was over. Mother and son moved into the neighborhood of man. In some parts of India it is the period of migration. From the first of March the dry season rules.

The present short spring ended in a heat wave. First, it put its tentacles at the root of saplings, reeds, bamboo, and grass. Then, leaf by leaf the trees lost their brief spring foliage. The sudden burst of fragrance fell upon the land like a storm. Winter's decay was swept aside in a week.

In turn, spring was flung out of existence by the drought. Flowers withered as if poisoned. Leaves turned ashen on boughs. Dust like the finest powder descended layer upon layer on seeds and unborn herbs

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to hide them from the sun. That which yesterday was panoplied with spring now hid itself under a raiment of dust.

Such a crisis drives the wild ones in two directions. Some go to the depth of the jungle where thick branches of aged trees save the springs from completely drying up, while the rest of the forest-folk go to the land of wide rivers on whose banks men live.

"Civilization follows rivers." The villages of India dot the banks of her immense streams. There seems to be an ancient understanding between men and beasts. They draw nearer each other oppressed by the common terror of drought bordering on famine. During this particular dry season, Fierce-Face met mankind; also a man-eating tiger.

This man-eater was about sixteen years old, past his prime. His wind was poor. As for his muscles, they could not keep up a long chase after a wild animal of any kind. On the other hand, he had strength enough to pursue and kill domestic animals: such as cows, water buffaloes, sheep and goats. His powers were better than theirs. Every fibre of his body had

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been exercised, while they had lived their days at a slow pace.

It fell out that one day while he was chasing a cow, its herder stood in his way. The old cat was insane with anger. Without thinking, he chased and killed the wretched fellow. His easy victory over the unarmed biped convinced him that a man is easy to kill.

As the drought grew more and more relentless, bolder became the man-eater. In fact, he settled down to attack men and women and children. He had four legs to their two. He ran faster than they. Their two-footed run was no match for his speed.

The villagers found it dangerous to go out of doors after four in the afternoon. If there were some hardy spirits that did venture out, they left off doing so the moment they realized that there were two more tigers: Fierce-Face and his mother.

These two cats had come to the neighborhood of man indirectly; for they wanted to live near the broad river whose shores were ornamented with pasture, gardens and huts. The farmers who had seen the three cats thought them to be husband, wife and son! They

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hated the old murderer with good reason, but their hate of the other two was groundless.

In the meantime, the man-eater felt that the other cats had come to rob him of his single-handed reign of terror.

In order to feel safe the villagers came to their parched fields with beat of drums, roar of trumpets, and lighted torches. The cringing bipeds had united their forces to meet the triple tiger-menace. No matter how brave, any tiger would run from the thunder of drums and swaying of a dozen torches.

Little Fierce-Face was disturbed. But not his mother. Her discipline grew harsher. She was determined to make a tiger out of him. His cub days must be ended. The rules that she had made had to be obeyed. She insisted on sleep by day and hunt by night. Besides, she refused her son's request to hunt man or his animals. She forced him to live by preying on the wild beasts that had drawn towards man's world of tawny rivers. It was not very easy to pursue many of these creatures, for there was no high grass to conceal the killer. Nor were there plants with leaves to give hiding quarters. In the moon-lit hours the plains burnt

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with bright gold light betraying the movements of the smallest animals.

Yet mother and son disdained hurting man and his cattle. Once they killed a cow by mistake. It was a dark dusty night. By some chance the cowherds had forgotten a cow. This stupid animal had strayed far into the wilderness.

About midnight Fierce-Face sighted on the bank of the river a crystal shape haloed with moonbeams. It struck awe into his heart. He had never seen a white cow roaming wild before. To him it was a divinity. His instinct urged him to sneak past this apparition of beauty. But something touched the tip of his tail. It was the paw of his guardian. She was saying, "Attack, or I will strike you."

He hesitated. Again that slight touch telegraphed to his brain, "Attack or..."

Suddenly, the cow rose and groaned in anger. With horns ready, she came like a thunderbolt at the four sea-colored eyes that she had seen. Fierce-Face was touched by terror. But that was nothing compared with the terrifying "Grr" of his mother. It



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forced him to leap forward. The dusty moonlit air felt like sprays of topaz-colored down.

At last he had done it! But the cow was too strong. With one shake of her body she threw him off her shoulder and plunged headlong at the mother. Alas, the tigress was an expert: she dodged by moving aside. Then she leaped at the cow, but missed. Apparently her intention was to make the cub do all the work. He seemed to sense this. He rushed after the fleeing prey roaring like a veteran of the game.

At this stage the bovine saw something that frightened her to a standstill. There was a third tiger standing in the distance. Stupidity, the proverbial quality of cows, led to her undoing. Instead of plunging at the man-eater, who had only come to look, she stopped to think. Before she had taken any decisive step, Fierce-Face was upon her neck.

The mother tiger watched, not her son but the old cat. He was already coming forward to share in the kill.

With a growl for a warning, she charged. The moonlight dripped from her body in silver rain. Claws and teeth began their deadly work. Howls of hate

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rolled on the river, then struck the sleeping houses and roofs.

In a few minutes the old fellow had learnt that it must be retreat or death. At this point he saw another tiger coming towards him. It was Fierce-Face bringing aid to his mother. This shook his self-confidence. A sharp blow seared his body. He rushed away into the jungle.

This battle led to the maneater's capture by men. But we must tell the story event by event.

On the morrow, the old cat found himself bruised and cut in many places. Not only that, he had bled profusely through one wound. He was forced to heal himself. So he took to eating herbs. And these were not easy to find. Next he needed salt for his diet. Beasts of prey generally get salt from the meat and blood of their kill. He had no strength to get a victim. The only way left for him was to lick the mud of the river, for it was full of salty deposit. For days his diet consisted of mud and a few herbs. Owing to it he was not able to move fast or far.

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A glance at the map of India will tell one that the Ganges reaches the sea in the Province of Bengal, the home of royal tigers. There the water is full of crocodiles and the long fingers of land full of tigers. The holy river forks out into innumerable mud-red streams. Though the place rarely sees pythons, during the rains of August floods from the north wash down Himalayan serpents many feet long to the jungles of the salt lick. Once there, a tiger rarely forsakes the place. For to the long neck of land come many vegetarian animals to eat salt which prevents diseases such as dropsy. Here, at last, the civilized human beings found it easy to track the man-eater down. By watching from tree-tops, they made out the state of his health. Man's cunning worked faster than the animal's wisdom. They dug a pit ten feet deep and as many feet square, then covered it with bamboo and luscious twigs. To make it all the more innocent-looking they left a dozen roosters tethered to long strings on top. These crowed or ate grains of rice thrown down from a tree where a man hid. The latter had built a spacious platform where he kept sacks of food both for himself and for the decoys below.

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From his point of vantage he could see the movements of many animals on the floor of the jungle.

After several days spent in eating salty mud and grass, the man-eater felt very hungry. He needed diet fit for his race. His instinct told him to return to the village to hunt. This was difficult for one tired and worn. He felt hungrier and hungrier; every step that he took seemed to be his last.

It was about eleven in the morning when he was passing near the trap. He heard a rooster crow. He realized at once that it was a barnyard fowl. Thinking that he was drawing close to a village, he tried to hurry in the direction of the noise. He could not walk fast.

At this juncture he heard the roosters crow several times, and his ears told him that the birds were within reach. He ambled on laboriously. It was not long before he was standing near the trap. In the white heat haze caused by the tropical sun the yellow-red birds appeared like woodcocks of the wild. Deceptive colors hung in the air between the cat and the barnyard fowl. Just the same something within him hinted that he had better keep away.



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From a tree-top a twig fell, hitting one of the birds. Its wings fluttered; then it screamed in pain. The man-eater surmised that all the birds might fly away, and he was too hungry to let this happen. So he rushed at the feathered fraternity. Then like a sleeper falling in his dreams, he fell — down and down and down . . .

Suddenly, he struck the bottom of the trap. Though the chickens had fallen with him, he had no desire to eat them. The catastrophe had robbed him of his appetite.

There he lay three days. Instead of killing him the villagers placed him in an iron cage and drove him to the nearest dealer in animals. After selling him, they took the proceeds home. It was distributed evenly among those whose cattle the man-eater had slain.



MYSTERY OF MAN

THE village breathed easily after the caging of the old tiger. The latter, too, seemed relieved at the fact that he got one meal a day without the bother of hunting. Sometimes, homesick for the woods, he tried to break through his cage. But finding this futile, he resigned himself to captivity.

In the meantime, Fierce-Face with his mother's help began to study mankind. Day and night man engrossed his curiosity. The judgments formed on this subject he communicated to his mother for criticism.

One sundown after they had eaten off a wild pig, he said to his mother, "Man is timid."

The elder cat licked her paws clean, then remarked, "But do not count on it. I have known him to run from cats in order to kill them by belching fire from up a tree. He is dangerous."

"When is the beast most dangerous, mother?"

The old cat's eyes glowed with terror. She remarked, "Do not come near man when on the neck of an elephant. He belches out unerring death-fire."

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"Why are elephants so stupid as to let man ride them?"

"Because Thick-Hide is a vegetarian, and like cattle and horse submits to man."

"Tell me your experience with man on elephant, mother."

"It was long, long ago, when your grandfather was killed. You see, all tom cats hate their sons. But they play with their daughters. I was hardly a year old when he and I were playing in a forest and we heard noises of elephants. These were the wild ones. They whispered through their trunks, "Man!" and ran silently out of sight. Then came two panthers; they, too, ran softly. Behind them came herd after herd of buffaloes mixed with deer in droves. Monkeys screamed from tree to tree as they ran. Parakeets, pigeons and peacocks screamed past. Now cats of all kinds: tigers, cheetahs and spotted leopards stole past. We caught their panic. My father nosed me from behind. We ran. We sprang over rivulets, thorn-patches, serpent holes and scorpion dens. These in turn imbibed our terror and hid out of sight. Now some

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monkeys jumped off their trees out of terror and joined the procession below.

"We came to an open space full of tall grass. There all the thud of our run was silenced instantly. Tame elephants with men on their necks faced us. Elephant and man atop. Sudden and puzzling! Between ourselves and the jungle beyond was an open space surrounded by man-elephants. Deer, buffalo and others were allowed to pass unhurt. But not cats. Any time we came into view, the fire fell on someone, killing him. . . .

"Your grandfather said, 'Follow me. I will frighten the man while you take advantage of his fear and run into the jungle opposite.'

"We tigers never argue. I followed his order. He rushed the first elephant. In a trice he was almost on its neck. This made all the others trumpet and scatter. Without waiting to watch, I rushed past them into the jungle, some shots sizzling through the air after me."

A dismal silence fell. The mother looked into the night glittering with fireflies. Fierce-Face asked, "What happened to your father?"

"I never saw him again."



MAN'S WEAKNESS

FIERCE-FACE discovered man's greatest weakness by chance. One day a tethered elephant — tied to a tree — and a group of woodcutters saw him. The men instantly took refuge on the hati. The latter usually brought them into the jungle, and at the end of the day carried loads of wood and some of the men back to their village. This spectacle puzzled Fierce-Face. In order to study it at a distance, he went under cover. Behold, the elephant would not move at all. The men had forgotten to cut his rope. When night came the tiger went off hunting. The men, finding their opportunity, freed their mount, then rode back to civilization.

The second time he saw men was at the drinking place. During the drought the need of water made the jungle folk and those of the village come to the one stream that had not dried up for water. Naturally, the need of it being great, every kind of hunting was suspended as if by common consent. Animals do not hold meetings and pass laws. They agree instinctively and carry out what seems to them universally

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desirable. From March till May they did not prey on one another near the river.

An antelope drank peacefully within twenty yards of a striped cat without becoming nervous. The code of the forest was adhered to by both. . . . But when Fierce-Face came upon the men filling their bullock-skin water-jars with water, they dropped everything, and ran up the far shore. There they seemed to wander, making circles and emitting shouts. Fearing that they might do harm, he walked away to find Bagni. In the tiger language she informed her son that all animals walk in circles when very frightened. "That is why tigers instinctively shrink from frightening each other."

One day the tigress saw a cobra on her path. Behind her was her offspring. She did not want to go backwards lest it frighten the boy. To go forward meant death. She slouched, then lashed her tail. This told the one behind, "Come abreast and do as I do."

The cobra stood facing the tigress whose head was higher than his. It had not yet seen Fierce-Face who was hidden behind his parent, obeying silent messages.



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It was a sight worthy of a painter. In the shadow of a leafless tree, between bronze reeds and grass, rose an ebony shape, growing longer every second. The sun played on its coil where a slight haze of dust wrought a veil. The tigress and the cub looked like brown rocks wearing jet-black cracks. Only when they moved they caused the dust to rise like amber. The cat in the lead had to crouch low or high according to the level kept by the enemy's eyes. Eye fought eye.

Slouching and swaying her head from side to side in time with the "Stinger's" slow rhythm irked Bagni. But there was no other way of being safe. She must keep her eyes above those of her enemy by an inch. If the latter hissed, she snarled. Fortunately, they were not within striking distance of one another. Nor did they wish to draw nearer.

As if she had been struck a blow on the head, Bagni felt sleep, the most heavy sleep, come over her. That steady gazing down her nose had nearly hypnotized her. Snakes do not do this on purpose. But looking into their eyes steadily sometimes produces a weird effect on all animals. Desperate, though not outwitted, Bagni forced herself to lash the ground

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hard with her tail. It signalled the cub to come abreast of her. He came forward raising his head as high as he could. It stood higher than his parent's.

The snake felt dizzy when four tiger-eyes came into view. It tried to raise its head higher. This altered its angle of vision. Instantly, the hypnotic effect passed, giving the elder cat a fresh idea. She took several steps backwards, making Fierce-Face do the same.

The move had a strange effect on their enemy. A spasm passed through the "creeping killer." The strain of watching two pairs of unrelenting topaz eyes had told on its sinuous spine. It could not stand erect any longer. Beaten and humbled, it slowly lowered its head and uncoiled itself. Resting and watching, it prepared to deal a fatal bite if attacked. But the cats made no move. Convinced that they meant to withdraw, the cobra slid out of sight.

❧ VII ❧

A FUTILE HUNT

THE drought had reached its final stage. Even the wildest animal sought shelter near humanity. Those buffaloes that keep far away from detection in the heart of the forest had stolen their way to the broad river.

One evening a black buffalo was seen grazing. It was a dark night. The bovine seemed to melt into the surrounding air. Now and then his muzzle touching the dry grass made the noise of small beads sliding on a string. Bagni hung back. Fierce-Face led the attack. He did all the formal moves as he had learnt, making a circle around his prey. The buffalo was so hungry that he kept busy eating, his nose close to the ground. The dust in the air obstructed his scenting tiger. His nostrils signalled no danger, though the killer drew nearer by shortening the circle of attack. Still, no response from the grazer disconcerted Fierce-Face.

Crouching was the next thing to do: Pressing himself close to the ground, he advanced from the rear. He had taken care to come up the wind. Soon he was reaching the point whence a leap would land him on

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the buffalo's neck. Suddenly, something seemed to explode under his paw. A dry leaf crackled. The buffalo turned about and lowered his head. His tail stood erect, stabbing the sky. His eyes burnt scarlet.

The tigress saw it all from a nearby hiding place, but would not interfere. One misstep and she would be childless. Yet she would not break her silence. Crouching taut like a withe she watched. The buffalo bellowed as he ran forward. Fierce-Face being a male did what all males do when challenged. He roared: "Gr-rr-!" The buffalo drew nearer and still nearer.

Like a bull-fighter the cat leapt away from his path. The horned one had anticipated this. He cut a short circle, fast as lightning, and plunged once more at the green eyes ahead. Again Fierce-Face dodged, alas, a shade too late. One horn had scratched his left haunch. The ensuing pain whetted his cunning to razor-edge. Instead of doing any tricks, he followed hot after the bull wherever he led. Invariably keeping close to its rear, he ran.

This fact, that he could not face his pursuer, worried the buffalo. He could not shake the fellow off

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his trail, nor could he see him in a cloud of dust. Feeling that he was free of his enemy behind the screen of dust, he ran in a straight line to the village.

The dogs who had been roused by the thud of his hoofs set up a howl rousing their owners from sleep. Lights began to flash from windows stinging his sight. The buffalo was frightened. His panic made him believe that he was flanked by tigers, men and dogs. His movements had to be carried out in a haze of dust, but it did not dull his nostrils. He could scent his way out into safety.

There was one point of the compass free of all odors of inimical beasts. It seemed free from danger. For a moment he slowed down in order to make sure of his bearings. He was appalled by what flashed ahead. A pair of green eyes peered through the dust thinned by a lazy wind. Instantly, he bent his neck and cast a swift glance backward. Another pair of burning emeralds was coming at him from behind. Stillness reigned everywhere. The dogs had stopped barking. Stillness and death were before him.

Suddenly he felt angry and rash. He rushed at the green image of death at the rear. This raised a cloud

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of dust screening him from the view of one feline killer at least. He plunged ahead with fury and force. So swiftly had he made his charge that he took the emerald eyes of Fierce-Face by thundering surprise. The dust that rose with the bull's passing seemed kindled with threats. Instead of running away Fierce-Face leaped for the bull's neck. . . . And missed. In a trice the latter rushed to safety in the dry jungle.

❧ VIII ❧

WHERE TIGERS DIE

THAT night passed without Bagni and Fierce-Face finding a morsel of food. A little before sunrise they decided to go into the deep forest for its coolness, for the sun seemed to burn every open space. The more they advanced, the thicker grew the shadow. Many trees, though nearly leafless, stretched their branches towards and into one another making a thick lattice-work through which the sun sent only a few of his deadly shafts.

The woods seemed deadlier than anything they had experienced so far. Not an animal disturbed the solitude of the place. Stillness lay heavy as lead on everything. They wandered without coming across a single prey. Yet, somewhat stimulated by the coolness the cats pressed on. They trod carefully; not a dry leaf cracked under their pads, nor did the half-dead grass utter a swish. No dust rose from their track. There was nothing to indicate life.

At last they reached a spot where no sunlight fell through the drought-denuded boughs. The tree-

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trunks wore parched vines for a dress. Not a twig fell fretting the calmness of the region. Fierce-Face dared not suggest anything. He followed wherever his mother led. Now and then he would come abreast of her. Her eyes refused to speak to his. Yet she gazed at him with a feeling of assurance. Glance after glance said nothing more.

The elder cat's intuition told her of the nature of the place. Just the same her instinct drove her deeper into the homeland of lifelessness. The solitude that they traversed did not harbor even a scorpion. Not a spider stretched his hairy legs on a death-meshed web. No insect crawled. Not a fly buzzed. Only silence... which the two felines broke, though fearing to break it. Stillness, softer stillness, seemed to trammel their feet. Each muscle and every sinew felt the poison of desolation. Thus the lifeless life of the place haunted them. Death felt near, near enough to touch.

Suddenly the mother stopped. She mewed most gently. Fierce-Face stopped and looked... There were some bones under their feet. The parent cat mewed twice, thrice... Directed by her cry the

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young tiger glanced ahead. He saw a skeleton. Was this the burial place of the tigers?

During the drought several tigers had fallen exhausted during their march. And there they had lain down to their last sleep. The bones were not old. What could be the animal or animals that had lived on their flesh? These were the vultures of the air.

The two cats stole away from the place. Death seen face to face had purged from their nerves every form of desire. Even their hunger they could not feel.

One more night they spent without hunting. Though they had gone long marches and eaten nothing for several days, and though their nature was to keep awake through the dark hours, this night both fell asleep like kittens. The god of sleep erased from their brains most of the images of the sanctuary of death that they had gathered. This is Nature's way of curing nerves. Only animals and savages are the real masters of this cure.

IX

CONFLAGRATION

THE drought ended in a forest fire. It was caused by wood-friction. The wind rubbed one dry branch of a tree against that of another forcing them both to smoke. Sparks falling from them set the dry brush on fire.

The buffaloes smelt it before it had spread. They mooed the news to the monkeys. The latter, in turn, screamed to the parakeets, wild martens, pheasants, kites, owls and ravens.

The song birds, whether *doel* (thrush), *papia* (nightingale) or the cooing doves fled to the highest summits of the air, too frightened to scream!

The first sign that the villagers caught of the danger was a fleet of flying peacocks. Squalls of sapphire and gold landed on housetops with the thud of stones. A cloud of white peacocks trailed by scarlet-russet pheasants descended on the mango-grove and the giant banyan, the only trees remaining green.

Among the four-footed nilgais and antelopes, herds of elephants skirted the village and vanished in the hot plains of India.

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Not an animal was afraid of man now; the fear of fire had made all forget the lesser fear of mankind.

In the deep jungle another drama was enacted. Fierce-Face and his mother were cut off from the open fields by a curtain of smoke. Though behind them lay unlimited stretches of forest, yet the blaze before them had hypnotized them. Their one desire was to break through to the open fields. They hardly dreamt of running into the forest behind. Tigers like other animals think that man can conquer fire. At the slightest intimation of a blaze they run to the world of men. Apparently animals think man is master and maker of fire. For hundreds of years they have seen his houses belching smoke into the distant sky.

Fierce-Face led his mother from place to place in search of an opening in the smoke-screen which might give them escape into the plough-lands.

The villagers in the meantime had carried everything they possessed on the backs of their animals to the broad river bank. Having made their families, chattels, etc., safe, they now banded themselves to save the village and the open fields from the jungle-flames. Soon a back-fire was started. It was when this



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back-fire was in progress that Fierce-Face decided to give up all attempts to go towards the village. The jungle was moving toward them, thronging with lighted torches. At this juncture the tigress took the lead. She set out for the hinterland behind them, dexterously skirting the homeland of death. They went for hours without meeting even the smallest animal. All the beasts had gone away from the burning forest.

They must have gone miles by now and reached the shallow bed of a wide river. It marked the end of one jungle and beginning of another. They walked past the middle to the cover of the high bank. There the water seemed two-span deep, and white, like the teeth of a boar. First they drank of it, then sprawled in its cooling silence.

“Protective coloring” hid them from both the jungle afire and the woods beyond. Seen from the edge of the former they looked like russet-purple sand. To the animals in the woods nearby they seemed like black mud and withered reed. Instinct told mother and child that they were safe. Soothed by the water and overpowered by fatigue, they felt sleepy. Back

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to back they crouched, muzzles on paws. The water could not reach even their chins, it was so low.

About half an hour later the tigress heard something drop on the bank above. Then a silent expectancy seized her mind. It took her a long while to convince herself that nothing was the matter. When about ready to fall asleep again, she perceived that a thick, long stream of water was sliding down the embankment. It was an animal. A python! Instead of attacking her, it was approaching within a few yards of her sleeping child.

At this point Fierce-Face was shocked into wakefulness by a snort like screeching lightning passing over his head. . . . Opening his eyes he saw a snake, very long and thick, approaching. . . . Swifter than a bolt the tigress had fallen on its middle. For a while it became impossible to tell which was tiger, which was snake. Snarling and groaning she fought till the thumping of her paws had torn the serpent into ribbons.

This gave them a chance to feed their famished bodies.

How such a large snake came there was, and is, a



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mystery, for in most parts of India this type is not common. Generally it lives in the deepest part of the jungle where even cats do not go frequently.

In the present case, whether it had come to take a drink of water or to do harm we cannot guess. Probably it had fallen off the high bank as it had uncoiled itself from a tree and to its own amazement, found the two tigers below.



RAINFALL

SUCH is the life of wild cats. They eat when they can get food. Sometimes they march in the heat for days in quest of prey. At other times, they seem to hunt and dine every night. In exceptional times like drought or flood, they go without food without feeling hungry until they are far away from the zone of danger. It is true that with a sense of safety feelings of hunger and thirst attack the animals.

The fire that had consumed more than one forest was followed by a heavy rainfall. In the tropics Nature manifests extremes of weather. Bagni and Fierce-Face started on their way back to their home, the jungle that they had known intimately. The drops of water falling from above made travel easy, for they felt cool. Even the sounds of rain seemed cool.

The first drumming drops were followed by smaller ones breaking like glass globes on the leafless trees. Where there were dry leaves the water rattled like beads unstrung. But the most delectable sound came from the bed of the river. . . . The showers were smothered in sand.

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Hardly had the rain fallen than the ground blazed into leaping tongues of green. With the verdure came the animals that live on it. This solved the problem of hunger for all felines. Hunting became easy. Every two nights a barking deer, a sambur (the Indian elk) or a nilgai came the way of our friends. Life was bearable once more. In a week's time the forest became an emerald abyss full of life.

Males of some species have to declare war in order to win their mates. Love fights with death in order to win the one it loves. So now the two actors, Love and Death, resumed their ancient feud. Bulls bellowed, tigers roared, eagles screamed and staccato parakeets strung the air with their shrieks. Hidden rills came to life again. Springs that had seemed dead, now fiercely clawed their way out of the earth. When the sky had cleared, clamor of waters caressed the echoes from jungle to jungle.

If we were animals, we would find out that a knowledge of sounds is given to every youngling. In the case of elephants, whose eyes are not good, the science of noise and odors has to be given. To cats, sights and shades of sound are taught. Fierce-Face had



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learnt to grasp the meaning of many during his training. Even the fall of a leaf had to be gauged with clearness. He could tell whether the leaf was dry or wet by the manner of its striking the ground. If a serpent were sliding within a few yards, he surely knew it. Whether it was a panther or a large monkey moving in a tree above, he could decipher instantly. Elephants and boars or herds of wild cows were easy to discern from a distance, for the ground trembled under their march. Even the flight of flocks of geese he had no difficulty in guessing.

Insects, winds, grass and saplings baffled him. Though he could tell certainly whether a porcupine was bristling or not within a few paces, yet he could not quite see whether it was wind in the larches or a panther taking a slow drink. Here the evidence of the ear had to be verified by the eye. In time he learnt to do this quickly without errors.

❧ XI ❧

THE CUB COMES OF AGE

IT WAS not long before Fierce-Face had to face the supreme problem of his life. There appeared before him and his mother a tiger ten years old who seemed to be at the height of suppleness and energy. The way of his mother's meeting the intruder told the son that he must leave her to marry him. Also in his blood he felt the call of mastery. He, too, must go and find his tigress. Instantly, he disappeared.

Though his mother looked for him here and there, she could not find him. Besides, her instinct told her that what had happened was right. Male cats hate one another intensely. Fierce-Face not only left his mother but he took good care not to come near the new tiger. He prowled and watched as he wandered away.

He had gone two days when he felt hungry enough to hunt alone. A tremor shook his body. He was indeed alone. Forlorn, friendless, he must seek out and kill his prey. How? It was not easy to hunt in a forest where the tall grass and thick leaves hid every animal from sight. Besides, his scent was not as keen as that of his prey. No feline animal has very sensitive nos-

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trils. He has to use his eyes almost exclusively. Just now these were handicapped by the vegetation about him.

All day he roamed in vain. Searching after a stag proved useless and wearying. At sundown he went to a ravine and drank of its steaming, sun-possessed water. As evening stole through the jungle a wild boar, who had come to drink, saw him. He charged with a grunt that seemed to crack the tiger's hearing. The latter saw the white of tusks flash in the gloom. A moment more, these would go into his own throat. With a growl of disgust he leaped into the air and let the enemy pass under him. A low bough above got in his way. Instead of clearing the pig, he fell on its back clawing and biting.

This was wasting time. The enemy shook him off, but instead of running home, the stupid boar came at him once more. In the tiger's eyes there was death. In the blackness of night they glowed green framed in red rings. Fierce-Face struck at the hog's nose below his tusks making him roll on the ground. Like a hawk on a sparrow, he buried his teeth in his chest. . .

❧ XII ❧

MATING

TO MANY tigers marriage is a lifelong relationship. It takes place after combats with a male or two. The young female has more than one suitor. Naturally, her husband has to humble them before she will permit herself to wed him.

Fierce-Face had not dreamt of marriage before he left his mother. In fact, many animals never think of it definitely. In the case of our tiger, he wanted a female to be his mother, for without her he felt lonely.

Thought is the harbinger of experience. In a few days he came upon a tigress about his own age. The dew was on the grass; wild flowers glowed scarlet and gold, while the sun rolled over the forest — a diamond wheel with spokes of ruby.

The female had just washed and dried herself clean of every trace of her hunt and gorging. On the water of the brook lay her shadow, a perfection of size and shape. About her rose tall grass and saplings, making a violet haze. Seen through it she seemed real and unreal at the same time.

Fierce-Face had come upon her without warning.

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She dug her paws into the ground in order to be ready for an attack. He, too, did the same. His eyes told him that this was a female. Now his ears heard a mew-ing sound. Responding to her with silence, he crouched and took his drink. A desire to show off came upon him. Instantly, he lay down by the water and licked himself clean. After he had finished his toilet, he looked up. Behold, there was no tigress!

But from that moment onward she watched him day and night. He failed to find her, but she never ceased following him. Lightly she moved about. He named her Light-Leap. Long before his decision, she had decided to marry him. Day by day she drew nearer. It soon became evident to him that he must look upon her as his mate. Animals do not delay in such matters: Fierce-Face became her friend and protector.

No sooner had she been seen playing with him than, one afternoon, a young male came from nowhere and set up a growl. Fierce-Face knew by instinct that this was a rival and he must fight for his lady. Hardly had Light-Leap withdrawn a dozen feet when the combat began.

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It was not a fight between the feline and the bovine, nor did it resemble a war between panther and python. It was cat against cat for his mate. The jungle never sees more cruel or more cunning battle. The howl of these striped beasts silenced even the monkeys and the birds. The sunset sank softly as lead in water. Buffaloes, elephants and deer ran out of the remotest range of the roaring fighters. Night came clamorous with stars.

The battle stopped as suddenly as it had begun. Fierce-Face survived the struggle, the other did not. He panted, groaned and limped. Laboriously he dragged himself to a spring and lay in it.

Animals know by smell what the water carries. In some places the springs come through medicinal roots. They carry healing. Almost all the big game except the thick-skinned ones know this. When wounded and gashed they lie in the stream. They think the tongue of the water licks their wounds.

Fierce-Face lay on the lap of Mother Water till the "belling" of a wild sambur announced dawn. He crawled into a dark shady place and fell asleep

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before sunrise. About midday he was roused by a purring noise. It was Light-Leap licking his wounds.

They hunted and played together until the end of another season of drought. About June when the rains had begun to pour incessantly Light-Leap gave her husband to understand that she was going to hide for the birth of her cubs. It is the law of tigers that they never should try to find out where the female goes for nearly three months.

HERE ENDS THE STORY
OF FIERCE-FACE. AS WE
SAY IN THE EAST
TAMAM



